



networking currents

Contemporary Mail Art
Subjects and Issues

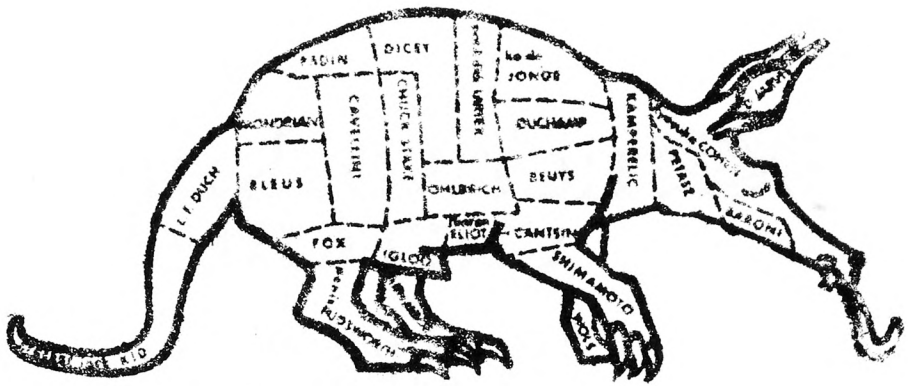
Chuck Welch

Sandbar Willow Press
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Printed in U.S.A.

First Edition

Cover: Design by the author

International Standard Book Number: 0-9615711-3-6
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 85-62588
Sandbar Willow Press
P.O. Box 883
Brookline, MA. 02146



All for Bud and "The Oreo Sneak".

*Mail Aardvark by David Jarvis

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INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The International Mail Art movement has reached a critical stage of development acknowledged by many active Mail Artists. A challenge exists which calls for action supporting the contention that Mail Art is indeed, the most important international art movement in the world today. Networking Currents is above all, an effort to explore Mail Art issues and international Networking activities occurring in the 1980's, especially between 1984 and 1985.

Part I of Networking Currents includes a brief history of Mail Art in consideration of those readers who have little knowledge of the Mail Art "experience." Mail Art media, process, products, issues and Networking projects are included in Part I as well. None of the projects or interpretations of Networking appearing in this book allude to the 1960's political activist Jerry Rubin and his networking philosophy.

Further on in Part III the reader will find good Mail Art descriptions given by six New York artists who were featured in a NYC radio broadcast in Spring, 1985. I wish to express my thanks to National Public Radio affiliate WNYC, to the producers of the program series, "Artists in the City." and to program host, Jenny Dixon for permission to print the Mail Art discussions.

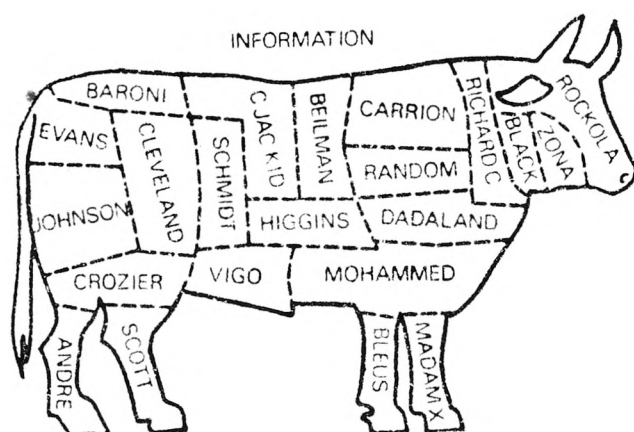
There are many friends within the international Mail Art movement who have offered their encouragement, suggestions and support in the production of Networking Currents. In particular I wish to thank J.P. Jacob and Steve Adelman for their assistance in typesetting and editing the text of Networking Currents. To my friends I offer heartfelt appreciation for their faith and trust.

Special thanks to Ryosuke Cohen, Shozo Shimamoto and all AU members whose Networking throughout 1985 brought "Flags for World Peace" to the Japanese public at Amagasaki, Aida, Kyoto, Tokyo and Hiroshima. Documentation of "Flags for World Peace" includes all "Peace Stamp" designs submitted by 170 artists for dispersal in Hiroshima on August 6, 1985. These materials appear in Part II and the appendix of Networking Currents.

Translation of Spanish and Japanese articles and correspondence were essential for the

preparation of research appearing in this book. My sincere appreciation to Wally Darnell and Graciela Marx for their spiritual support and more earthly assistance in translating South American texts. Also, my thanks to Sarah Freed and the Japanese Language Service of Cambridge, MA. for volunteering time to translate Japanese newspaper accounts of the "Flags for World Peace" events taking place in Japan.

All of the photographs appearing in the Appendix were prepared through the kind assistance of Los Angeles Mail Artist, Lon Spiegelman. Finally, my gratitude to Dr. Pam Allara, Tufts University Fine Arts instructor, writer and critic for Art News Magazine, whose good advice helped to organize and refine ideas and text.



Rockola's Mail Art Bull

NETWORKING CURRENTS

I

The Open Letter Manifesto

Mail Art has been in existence for over thirty years as an alternative, multi-lateral art form based on principles of free exchange and international access to all people regardless of nationality, race or creed. Little has been written about strategic issues which ultimately will point the direction that Mail Art will follow. Indeed, some controversial issues, if not confronted by Mail Artists themselves, could threaten the existence of Mail Art as a democratic based forum existing outside of traditional art systems. This book will address such issues, examine inherent limitations and offer Networking solutions for future international collaborative activities.

Only recently have controversial Mail Art issues been confronted. In February, 1984, Mail Artists were outraged by New York City art critic, Dr. Ronnie Cohen, when she exercised curatorial censorship by excluding Mail Art entries delivered to Franklin Furnace's "Mail Art Then and Now Mail Art International Show". When New York Mail Artist Carlo Pittore alerted art magazines and the Mail Art network about Dr. Cohen's choice to censor Mail Art at Franklin Furnace, tempers began to flare. The manifesto Pittore addressed to Dr. Cohen took the form of an open letter which rallied international support for decisive action. A study of Pittore's manifesto reveals that Mail Artists were angered because traditional codes of Mail Art ethics were violated:

"Your invitation stated that 'all materials' would be exhibited. As you know, this is a sacrosanct mail art concept - the primary aspect of mail art exhibitions - and that is 'everything' contributed to a mail art exhibition is to be exhibited. No rejections is synonymous with mail art, especially as the work is given and not returned, and you have arbitrarily decided to reject and edit. That you have decided to disregard this concept marks you as no friend to mail art, or to mail artists, and denies perhaps the most unique and appealing feature of this universal movement."

(1)

Further information describes the democratic principles of Mail Art: issues of open-accessibility and the arbitrary nature of good or bad taste in Mail Art:

"Mail art is open to anyone and everyone who hears about it, from art students to those who habitually receive rejections; to those like Vincent Van Gogh and Paul Cezanne who repeatedly suffered rejection by their contemporaries. The no rejections aspect of mail art cannot be done away with. Anyone can be a mail artist, by self-annointing, and by mailing. There are no subjective arbitrators of taste who define what is good or bad in mail art, and to deny this, as you have done, is to be totally insensitive, and opposed to mail art as an aesthetic." (2)

How can there be "no subjective arbitrators of taste who define what is good or bad in mail art" when Mail Artists advise newcomers; the amount of imaginative effort put into each Mail Art object equals what you receive? Like a Hallmark Greeting Card slogan, Mail Artists advise everyone to "care enough to send the very best." Nearly all Mail Artists find quality mail to be a first-class preference.

As subjective arbitrators gazing each day in the mailbox, Mail Artists oftentimes reject chain letters, fast copy art, or impersonalized form letters passing as correspondence. Popular Mail Artists face an increasing volume of mail because they often take time to send out good work. This dilemma forces active Mail Artists into making arbitrary decisions based on the availability of time and money or the caprice of daily attitudes and opinions. Clearly, there is good and bad Mail Art to choose from and all of it eventually travels to one or more of four destinations; altered mail passed onward to other artists, the dead letter office, the recipient's archive or trashcan.

Carlo Pittore's manifesto moves on to define Mail Art as "an International phenomenon that stretches around the world to thousands of artists in more than 35 countries... mail art is an overlapping artist-to-artist communication network, and it will remain that way!" (3) This too, is open to question as

there are vast areas of land where mail is limited by government suppression or geographic inaccessibility. South American Mail Artists face political censorship and enormous postal rates which affect their impressively strong desire to communicate beyond the boundaries of their respective countries.

In Africa, Mail Art is suppressed in countries like South Africa and Ghana where all mail is looked upon with suspicion. The "International phenomenon" Pittore speaks of consists of predominantly white, middle-class, male artists. Few black Mail Artists are actively involved with the international Mail Art movement and women, while many, are conspicuously few in group photographs of Mail Art events. Consideration should be given, as well, to the possibility that Mail Art is turning into a closed circuit club of artists exchanging work exclusively among artists.

Another issue involves the problem of presenting Mail Art effectively in public institutions. According to Dr. Cohen, part of the problem she encountered as a Mail Art curator at Franklin Furnace resulted from limited display space. Addressing that excuse, Carlo Pittore replied:

"By sponsoring the first mail art exhibition in such a significant space as Franklin Furnace, and in such a significant place as New York City, you had a real opportunity for introducing mail art to a wider audience. That you have placed the entire exhibition in a tiny room in the rear of Franklin Furnace - it deserves the whole building - and then also exhibit selected examples of mail art from the past, makes it impossible both to bridge the gulf of these epochs, or to perceive either the form or layered subtleties of metaphor that permeates the mail art network at the present time." (4)

Carlo Pittore's judgement of Dr. Cohen's failure to bridge past and present Mail Art is presumptuous when consideration is given to the attempt that was made to bring both epochs together for the first time in the history of Mail Art. For this effort, Dr. Cohen deserves credit. What lacks credibility, as Carlo Pittore implies, is the ambivalent manner in

which Dr. Cohen displayed past and present Mail Art.

When I visited the Franklin Furnace's "Mail Art Then and Now Mail Art International Show" I found evidence of significant contemporary Mail Art projects placed on the floor in two grocery boxes. These works, originally excluded for lack of adequate space, remained exposed while the "historical" Mail Art was carefully annotated on shelves within glass display cases. The physical disparity of presentation defeated what could have otherwise been a brilliant connection between past and present Mail Art epochs (Appendix, fig. 15)

Dr. Cohen's handling of the Mail Art exhibition at Franklin Furnace was an abysmal boondoggle. She failed to agree to promises stated in her invitations; no jury, no rejections, all work shown and the promise of a catalogue to every participant. While the rhetoric of Pittore's open letter manifesto is grandiose and pristine, it nevertheless represents the frustration of Mail Artists who had been blatantly exploited and discarded. Before the Franklin Furnace Mail Art exhibition closed, Mail Artists made a political stand at 22 Wooster St. Gallery; a fight that is now called "The 22 Wooster St. Gallery Mail Art Melee."

II

The Wooster Gallery Mail Art Melee

Instead of boycotting the "Mail Art Then and Now" Mail Art exhibition at Franklin Furnace, Mail Artists united to remove Dr. Cohen as moderator of the February 24th Mail Art "Artists Talk on Art" panel discussion at 22 Wooster St. Gallery in Soho, N.Y.C. While the 22 Wooster St. Gallery Mail Art panel discussion remains the first and only attempt by Mail Artists to publicly defend Mail Art, the proceedings were diminished by insults, jeering, accusations and heated arguments. Gary Azon of the Village Voice described the February 24th Mail Art panel discussion as a "Mail Art Melee":

"The evening got quite lively, with many in the wall-to-wall audience shouting accusations at each other and vociferously

arguing across the gallery space. A male Mail Artist dressed as a satyr, jumped up at one point and made some obscene gestures with his hand over his crotch in response to derisive barbs directed at him. 'Communication is the idea of Mail Art,' bellowed one of the panelists, E.F. Higgins III, outshouting the audience as he held a beer can in his hand. This was a hot night on the downtown art circuit." (5)

Lori Antonacci, executive director of the "Artist Talk on Art" series called the panel discussion, "one of the most dramatic and emotional discussions we've had in the ten years of these events." (6) (See Appendix, Figure 1) Faith Heisler, Correspondence Artist from Piscataway, New Jersey, later recalled, "They blasted her (Dr. Cohen) for going back on her word and removed her as moderator, giving the position over to John Held Jr., Mail Artist and librarian from Dallas, Texas. The statement made clear that Dr. Cohen was welcome to remain in the room for the discussion, but that the panelists objected to her acting as moderator because she, as a non-practitioner of postal art, had gone against its principles in passing judgement on the work she received." (7)

The failure of Mail Artists to effectively communicate their position in a public forum could be blamed on the negative decision to censor the censor. Moreover, a lack of support from a few raucous Mail Art hecklers in the audience negated any chance of solidarity among Mail Artists. In short, the public witnessed Mail Artists bickering among Mail Artists and the discussion scheduled for that night, "International Mail Art: The New Cultural Strategy," was never approached.

In recent years, Mail Artists have claimed Mail Art to be the most important art movement in the world today. Beyond this slogan and the rhetoric of manifestos are found limitations as seen at the 22 Wooster St. Gallery Mail Art panel discussions. Does the international Mail Art movement offer new visions for cultural strategy? Will Mail Art continue as a moral alternative to bureaucratic systems which censor artistic expression? Is there a basis for solidarity among artists to include change? Further on, this book will review current

Networking projects which exemplify work for new cultural strategies, but firsthand, a survey of past events will reveal how Mail Art grew to become an international art movement.

III Origins and Fluxus Factors

Historically, the Mail Art phenomenon has been in existence for over thirty years. New Mail Art sourcebooks generally agree, however, that Ray Johnson of Locust Valley, N.Y. is the "father of Mail Art." In the 1950s he created a network of both artists and non-artists which collectively became known as "The New York Correspondence School". Futurism, Surrealism, Fluxus and the fatalistic, dark humor of Nouveau Realisme are all early influences upon Mail Art, but French Dadaist Marcel Duchamp is the first artist responsible for conceptualizing communication with aesthetic purposes in his work entitled "Grande verre."
(8)

The "Grande verre" is a collection of texts, objects, drawings and documents which together form a complicated system of language. The symbolic form used in this esoteric collection is difficult to grasp at first sight. With considerable effort the content can be deciphered, but in the complicated process Duchamp requires his viewer to investigate the very structure of communication.

"In 'Grande verre,' we encounter four postcards attached to a common backing. The work involved is the 'Rendevous of 6 February, 1916,' which the artist presented to his then neighbors, the Arensbergs. On one side, the postcards tell us about the rendezvous, while on the other, a more or less ciphered text tells us about the 'Grand verre' and adjoining works. Just as Duchamp maintains an ambiguous relationship with the genuine comprehension of his work, he plays with the means of communication by mailing a message which he might have more easily transmitted orally. This was to our knowledge the first artistic phenomenon to derive its meaning from the use of the mails." (9)

Duchamp's conceptual play was not the single influence on the development of Mail Art today. Kurt Schwitters created an early experimental book of rubber stamp art, and as early as 1916, Russian constructivists used rubber stamps in a published magazine. The Italian Futurists created unusual stationary and displayed a flair for inventive correspondence. In the early 1950s, Ad Reinhardt used the mail as a way of reporting hilarious and sometimes sarcastic messages about the art world. In spite of these isolated historical facts, there is no evidence today that Mail Art evolved because of these individuals.

According to Fluxus historian Ken Friedman, the Mail Art medium vanished until the late 1950s, but recent research substantiates the existence of creative conceptual Mail Art activities during the early 1950s. (10) Before the advent of Fluxus, Nouveau Realisme or the New York Correspondence School, a group of individuals known as Local Postfolks, were playing postmaster in official and unorthodox capacities involving stampmaking and creative mail delivery. This community of amateur artists is collectively known as The Local Post Collectors Society, and its international membership includes Americans, Japanese, Swedes, New Zealanders, British and Canadians. Their collaborative and individual activities include shooting mail from cannons, dropping mail from airplanes, flying mail in rockets and aircraft, and carrying mail by dogs, camels, porpoises and bicycles to places difficult to reach by traditional mail delivery systems. (11)

While evidence of Local Postfolks cannot be found in any Mail Art publications, a 522 page "sourcebook" entitled Correspondence Art provides a somewhat accurate presentation of Mail Art activity to 1978. Prior to the publishing of this book in 1984 by Contemporary Arts Press, the lack of accurate data and the enormous variety of sources seemed to negate the possibility of such a sourcebook.

There are passages within Correspondence Art, however, which are confusing and vague. The editor, Michael Crane, selected 1976 as a critical point in Mail Art evolution primarily

because Mail Art shifted away from individually based exchanges towards direct mailing intended solely for international exhibitions and publications. As a result, the fundamental importance of individual interaction in the 1970s seemed threatened by sloganeering and pretentious projections of image-making. Crane views Mail Art of the 1970s as phenomenal only in its growth as an international activity. By comparison to the 1970s, Crane asserts that Correspondence Art of the 1960s was created with a positive self-view and an "aim to establish a community and new social realism via group action." (12)

Crane fails to establish the criteria necessary to define how a genuine "movement" came to be realized during the 1960's. Perhaps Crane is referring to Fluxus activities occurring in New York during the early 1960s. In 1979, Lightworks Magazine defined Fluxus as "renegade art, always on the fringe and continually defying tradition... akin to dada, the work of John Cage and even Zen, it is perhaps best described as 'a way of doing things'." (13)

Together, Mail Art and Fluxus are easily categorized as marginal activities; both are renegade art forms which emphasize conceptual ways of doing things. Fluxus artists, however, evoked the importance of their private domain as the focal point for all things. Mail Artists claim they do not exclude intimacy through correspondence but transcend self in favor of cultural bonding by international collaboration.

In the 1960s, Fluxus artists were engaged in numerous "private" mailing activities often referred to as Correspondence Art. Were these "private mailings" by Fluxus artists intended to establish a positive movement for community and new social realism? Ken Friedman recalls:

"At first (during the 60s), the Fluxus artists active in the correspondence art world, including many who did not participate in the New York Correspondence School, were quite content to create private works. These included mail art pieces by individuals, and marvellous series of publications, post cards, stamps and stationery by George Maciunas for Fluxus artists including Bob Watts, Robert Filliou, Ben Vautier, Daniel Spoerri, and others amongst us." (14)

If Fluxus artists during the 1960s were quite content to create private works of Correspondence Art, why does Michael Crane interpret these activities as a positive movement for community and new social realism? Quotes by founders of Fluxus contradict Crane's assertion. Dick Higgins wrote, "There is no creed, no possibility of a 'Fluxus group' which would probably have driven every one of us away." (15) Fluxus artist and critic Peter Frank labelled Fluxus as a "tendency" while Fluxus artist George Brecht is quoted to have observed that, "In Fluxus there has never been any attempt to agree on aims or methods." (16)

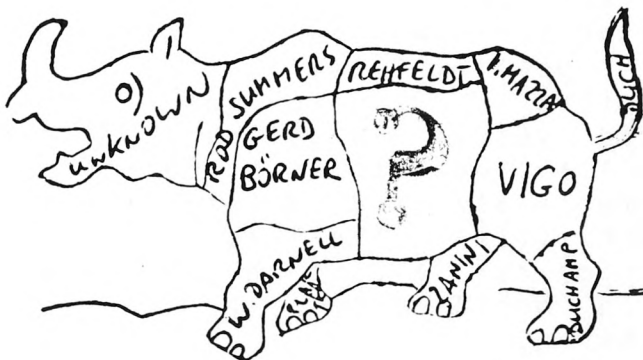
Ken Friedman is the Fluxus artist who was instrumental in taking Correspondence Art out of the Fluxus "private domain" by organizing international mailing lists, exhibitions and publications. These "public efforts," according to Friedman, "embodied not only correspondence art, but a larger and admittedly less private Mail Art. It was at this time (late 1960s) that Mail Art first created, and began to make real its potential for social change and for contributing new forms of communication in the world." (17)

If the "potential" of Mail Art as a positive, social community of artists grew out of Friedman's association with Fluxus in the late 1960s, it wasn't until the 1970s that the "potential" was experimentally realized in enormous public and educational projects like Friedman's "Omaha Flows System". Furthermore, an international community of Networking artists exists today who regard the act of "mailing art" less important than philosophical and aesthetic messages that are imbued with myriad possibilities for creative, collaborative communication. In short, Networking values and philosophy are evolving from Mail Art activities. Inevitably, due to the enormous size and variety of current Mail Art sensibilities, the late 1980s will witness the ontological evolution of "Networkisms" based on world community, communion and communication.

The Fluxus "private potential" suggested the possibility of an international artistic community but it wasn't until the 1970s that some positive, experimental Mail Art efforts

were made. Indeed, throughout the 1970s and 1980s active Mail Art social interaction had occurred in South America through efforts by Clemente Padin, Graciela Marx, Leonhard Frank Duch, Edgardo Vigo and others. Written advocacy for social interaction can be found in German Dadaist Klaus Groh's "International Artists Cooperation Info Sheets" which were circulated between 1971-1978. (18) The French theorist Herve Fischer's influential "Art and Marginal Communication" was published in 1974, and Ken Friedman's enormous "Omaha Flows System: International Mail Art Exhibition" opened up interaction between the non-artist public and the Mail Art world in 1973. All of these activities encouraged a new social realism through collaborative action.

Much remains to be written about the history of International Mail Art, particularly from 1978 through the mid 1980s. Moreover, present Mail Art Networking activities are moving far into the future as Mail Artists in touch with the daily advancement of our computerized "Age of Information" are experimenting with newer, expedient mass media techniques. Critics and art historians can analyze recent and current Mail Art Networking projects by evaluating motivational factors among artists and identifying mass media techniques for the production of multiples. An historical summary of mass media techniques commonly used by Mail Artists follows.



Mail Art Rhino by Leonhard Frank Duch

IV Mail Art and Mass Media

Mass media techniques involve the production of multiples for network distribution. Rubber stamping, artistamps, copy art, concrete poetry and literature, artistbooks, audio, video and postcards are forms of mass media actively exchanged within and outside the Mail Art movement. It is sometimes difficult to ascertain who is currently responsible for innovative communicative growth within these categories. Indeed, some artists within these media will deny any association with the Mail Art movement although they may have had contact with Mail Artists.

Rubberstamp and artistamp activity, while not exclusively Mail Art, have played an important role in the history of Mail Art. Many books and articles attest to their popularity. The Canadian Mail Artist, Michael Bidner, has assembled The Standard Artistamp Catalogue and Handbook (Canada and Worldwide), which promises to be the High Art equivalent to Philately's Scott's Stamp Catalogue. Over 800 artists from 35 countries have stampwork crossreferenced in Bidner's monumental catalogue.

Rubberstamps and artistamps are known within Mail Art because of their visibility and ease of usage on stationary, envelopes, packages, mailing tubes, postcards etc. Memorable rubber stamps become associated with artists whose identities are fused together in the stamp imagery. Sometimes rubber stamp slogans emerge anonymously and attain importance through widespread usage.

Artistamps, like rubberstamp art, have been used extensively by artists throughout the development of Mail Art from 1970 to present. E.F. Higgins III of DooDah Postage Works, NYC, paints stamps on canvases that are many times portraits of friends who are active in the international Mail Art movement.

Many artistamp sheets and rubberstamps were created by Fluxus artists in the early to mid-1960s. American Fluxus pioneer, George Maciunas, printed sheets of forty two stamps which were labelled "Fluxpost". Italian Mail Artist, Guglielmo Achille Cavellini, has created many ersatz documentary stamps which

celebrate his importance as an old master before his time. Cavellini's stamps are labelled "international postage" and are given the denomination of 333, the name of his chain of Italian mini-markets which have made him wealthy. Cavellini, in his quest for self-immortalization, is photographed in nearly all of his postage stamps. (Appendix, figure 2)

Like artistamp and rubberstamp images, audio cassettes function as multiples for easy distribution via international postal systems. The audio letter is most commonly exchanged among Mail Artists as a verbal form of Correspondence Art. Mail Artists also use audio cassettes as experimental recordings from readymade sources. Keith Bowsza (a.k.a. Minoy) of Redondo Beach, Ca., "sculpts" sound images with tape loops, amplified and reverberated sounds or telephone generated sounds.

Collaborative Mail Art concepts of free exchange and access are explored in "Newsounds Gallery", an audio art broadcast on CFRO Radio, Vancouver, B.C., Canada. The director of "Newsounds", Gerald Jupiter-Larsen, is also an active international Mail Artist who structures his broadcasts around public free access. Artfoot is another Mail Artist who hosts an open forum audio art program entitled "Over the Edge" on KPFA in Berkeley, Ca. Artfoot and Jupiter-Larsen's radio stations send public invitations by mail which ask for taped cassettes based on "sound themes." A July, 1985 "Newsounds Gallery" invitation reads very much like an invitation to a Mail Art show: "Everyone out there is asked to send in an original sound work which deals with the theme of ABNORMALITY... cassettes only, all submissions aired, 10 minute maximum, no returns without S.A.S.E., Deadline: July 30, 1985, documentation of broadcast date to all contributors." (19)

Rod Summers of Maastricht, the Netherlands is responsible for worldwide exchange of audio cassettes by mail throughout the 1970s. Summer's "Visual Experimental Concrete" archive is one of the first international audio art archives existing as a large collection of sound works by many active Mail Artists, evidence that Mail Artists experiment in more than one networking medium. Presently, Summers is compiling a "Central Address Bank" of Mail

Artists with computers. Summers asked artists how they use their computers and for examples of their programming style. In return, each Mail Artist participant is promised a list of Mail Artists with computers compatible with their own.

In 1980, Swedish audio artist Peter R. Meyer produced documentation of audio art sent by five hundred artists in forty countries. This international audio work was mixed into a series of ten soundscapes that were broadcast around the world. The radio programs were titled "Nightexercise", and in 1984, a video art format was included under the same title.

Rapid communication via telecommunication media has become a fascinating networking mode for experimental artists. During the summer of 1984, a temporary telecommunications network was established by Grimsby Public Art Gallery in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Project coordinators at Grimsby called their experimental communications event "Particifax", a network in which Canada Post Intelpost telecommunications machines, Burroughs DEX 3200 and special WATS telephone lines were installed at Grimsby Gallery, Toronto; The Forest City Gallery, London; The Collective Art Technology Gallery, Toronto; and The Artculture Resource Center, Future Pod at Ontario Place near Toronto, Ontario.

The International Artistamp Exposition & Bourse, organized by Michael Bidner, was held at the Forest City Gallery Particifax site. This provided a marvelous opportunity for the public as they attended the Artistamp Exposition and experimented with transmissions of messages through the Intelpost terminal. In September 1984, Bidner helped establish telecommunication terminals connecting The Forest City Gallery with Mail Artists attending the San Francisco Inter-Dada Festival.

Mary Misner, coordinator of "Particifax" transmissions from the Grimsby Public Art Gallery in Toronto explained that over 3,000 invitations worldwide were sent to encourage participation in "Particifax." "Throughout the program, communications technology could be used for cultural exchanges and to give another dimension to collective artwork. It brings people together who would probably never meet... Today there has been a three-way

exchange between Pavia, Italy, Toronto, and Vienna, Austria, and the essence has been communal excitement." (20)

Projects incorporating mass media techniques like Mary Misner's "Particifax" and Peter R. Meyer's "Nightexercise" are important for cultural impact upon enormous audiences. Art historians must approach Mail Artists for motivational and aesthetic insights not available today in academic monographs or texts. Mail Artists, with their wealth of information stored in private archives, are the prime sources for understanding Networking aesthetics.

V

Archives for Further Research

Private and public Mail Art archives contain a large number of documents which will help researchers survey Mail Art activities between 1978-1985. Most Mail Art archives contain correspondence, catalogues, postcards, assemblages, graffiti, stamps, audio, video, bookworks, postcards, etc. Mail Artists like John Held, Dallas, Tx.; Lon Spiegelman, Los Angeles, Ca.; Ruud Janssen, Tilburg, The Netherlands; Guy Bleus, Wellen, Belgium; Vittore Baroni, Forte dei Marmi, Italy; Don Mabie, Calgary, Alberta, Canada; Bernd Löbach, Weddel, West Germany; Galantai Gyorgy, Budapest, Hungary; and David Zack, Tepoztalan, Morelos, Mexico; have organized archives where future research can be conducted. This brief list, while representative of diverse collections, is far from a comprehensive listing of important Mail Art archives.

Regardless of the existence of numerous archives, there are no historical Mail Art surveys in existence which accurately represent the entire Mail Art network. In America there are several notable accounts of East and West coast Mail Art activities, but this parochial view distracts from the perception of Mail Art as a global phenomenon. (21)

Mail Artists, aware of their significant role in aesthetic communications, are not waiting for green signals from the academic art community. Two Swedish Mail Artists, Leif Eriksson and Peter R. Meyer have gathered information from over 800 international Mail Artists for a comprehensive book project entitled Mailed Art. In an invitation

to submit varieties of original work to Mailed Art. Leif Eriksson revealed, "Originally Mailed Art was planned to be a cooperation with Postmuseum in Stockholm, but as we understood that the principles of Mail Art (no jury and no rejections, etc.) were not fully accepted by the committee of Postmuseum we decided not to cooperate with them and instead manage the project ourselves."

A notable effort was made in 1984 by two American editors, Michael Crane and Mary Stofflet, when they released Correspondence Art: A Source Book for the Network of International Postal Art Activity. While these editors have provided basic information which is invaluable for more comprehensive research, most reviewers have been less enthusiastic. In a May, 1985 Art Forum review of Correspondence Art, Greil Marcus incorrectly identified the Mail Art movement entirely with neo-Dadaism. In doing so Greil selected a Dadaistic Mail Art microcosm while dismissing the remainder of the Mail Art network as "the history of an immediately quaint form that excused itself from history." Marcus and other critics have ignored the multi-lateral socio-cultural activities in which Dadaistic concepts are but a slice of the network pie.

Information, communication aesthetics and cultural motivation determine whether an artwork or artist fit within the complex Mail Art and Networking movements. Thorough knowledge of the Mail Art product and process will aid historians and critics in unraveling the complicated maze of networking sensibilities.

VI

The Mail Art Product and Process

To achieve a critical understanding of the Mail Art process one must study a triangular connection between sender, object sent, and recipient. Subjective, psychological factors and motivation also effect the communication triangle:

"When artist X never answers the sendings of Y, sooner or later the one-way communication or pseudo-exchange will stop. So, the 'materialistic' aspect of receiving an answer in the form of a personal letter or a catalogue is especially important for its 'psychological' and practical consequences: staying in communication." (22)

Mail Art is about the free-exchange of communicative gifts, but the object in Mail Art is valuable only insofar as the recipient appreciates the exchange value of the object.

The Mail Artist as sender has absolute control over the production and distribution of the objects he or she mails. Mail Artists write what they want and choose dimensions, weight, what's outside and inside, but they have no control over the object after it is posted. A prime characteristic of Mail Art is that it bear evidence of having survived postal delivery.

Mail Art objects that are delivered into the mailstream are as varied as the individuals who mail them. I've been the recipient of 2' x 3' postcard poems, four foot long plaster sharks, soot in a plastic bag labelled as the last mortal remains of P. DiCarlo's aunt from Akron, Ohio, laminated money, dirt from Canada, a letter balloon I found on the beach at Nantucket, mousetraps, shoes, bonnets from Czechoslovakia, stamped stones from England, sand from Saudi Arabia, termite mound debris from Australia, Kentucky kudzu, and ground lobster from Maine. Throughout the entire process I've never met a postal official who lost their patience or sense of humor. In actuality, the true Mail Art hero is each Mail Artist's letter carrier.

Mail Art objects incite a variety of human emotions including excitement, exhilaration, curiosity, anticipation, apprehension, anxiety, anger, indifference, pleasure and boredom. Mail Art objects communicate time/space concepts, secrets, gossip, mysticism, games, collaboration, politics, whimsy and humor. The metamorphosis of Mail Art objects by mailing processes include work that is altered, damaged, lost or re-routed by the postal bureaucracy.

Can beauty be classified as a purposeful objective? Not necessarily! A beautiful postcard does not qualify an artist to become a "Mail Artist." Is the sender unpretentious when mailing art? Dutch Mail Artist Ulises Carrion states, "It depends on the artist. I would not care to say that Mail Artists are unpretentious. I for one, am very pretentious and there are those who state, 'I am a Mail Artist' which almost always means there are other artists who are no artists at all." (23)

What people play Mail Art? San Francisco art critic Thomas Albright lists, "poets, designers, photographers, typographers, architects,

psychologists, educators, and pranksters. Many are generalists schooled in a variety of traditional disciplines and unwilling to come to terms with contemporary specialization." (24)

Ulises Carrion states that Mail Artists use the post for "convenience." The message still remains the essential communicative ingredient no matter how one chooses to deliver. In 1978, Carrion established "The Erratic Air Mail International System" on paper as a proposal to circumnavigate the postal systems through hand-delivered messages. (25) When an artist considers using the mail as the primary way of transmitting messages, the strategy is classified as Mail Art. The best Mail Art incorporates the postal bureaucracy making it an operative component. By including the delivery system the concept is enhanced, but is it obligatory?

Carrion declares that artists and the public have lost themselves in the game, "They have come to think that making mail art means producing postcards." (26) Michael Crane calls it a popular fad, "a quick, easy way to make art." (27) A Mail Art theorist can become so involved with the structure of aesthetic communication that the significance of open participation can be lost in the mail game. Carrion states, "The moment has come to declare that mail art has very little to do with mail, and a lot to do with art." (28) Could this imply that Mail Art has very little to do with mail, a lot to do with art, and nothing to do with people... especially the "non-art" public? Mail Artists should consider what meaning and significance their aesthetic concepts hold, especially as they relate to art as life. If by definition, the Mail Art process is truly an open forum of creative communication, an aesthetic barrier should not be constructed which bars public participation.

VII

Networking and Mail Art Options

Within the context of this book I have chosen to introduce Networking as a term which signifies more than mailing Art or Artists' mailing. Networking involves artists and non-artists striving for creative communication in a spirit of communion and community. Networking involves respect for the individual in communion with others. In the present revolutionary age of

information Networkers can forge communities for positive change. We are entrapped in bureaucratic systems which alienate and segregate, diminishing selves to selfishness, but we can transcend these limitations as masters of our lives and not victims.

There is growing evidence among current active Networking artists that Mail Art is a term that is outlasting its ability to portray the global movement as it is now. In the past, Mail Art related well to the concept of communicating by post. Today, communication Networking is more than simply posted art objects or the pursuit of professional Mail Art careers resulting in artists bickering among themselves. Networking concepts of global communication, communion and community elevate message over medium.

The importance of Networking for public participation in Mail Art has grown in Japan through efforts by Shozo Shimamoto, Ryosuke Cohen and other members of the "Art Unidentified" organization. According to Shimamoto, in Japan "Mail art concepts are giving birth to an endless series of changing ideas, each hitherto considered astounding or even unbelievable, from an individual to a global level involving Mail Art networks. In this, I can see more than anything else the strength or potential of the Mail Art world." (29)

Mail Art is still the prime source of global communication. Postal rates continue to climb, however, while telecommunications and computer technology are becoming increasingly sophisticated and affordable. Growing exploitation of the Mail Art medium by profiteers and artists competing to use the medium to further their professional High Art careers distort the spiritual values of Mail Art. According to Los Angeles Mail Artist Lon Spiegelman, "Mail Art seems to have turned into an adversary proceeding rather than a network of close friends playing and supporting each other." (30) Clearly, the time has come for Mail Artists to decide for themselves what objectives and motives they should recognize. According to Guy Bleus there are three major choices the "eternal network" must eventually face:

"Mail Art is anchored in an existing medium (the post) to develop a new art circuit, loose from the official art circuit. Just how isolated is this new structure? And what are the intentions

of Mail Artists with the network in the future? Three options are possible. 1. Discontinue the circuit and stop Mail Art. 2. Mail Art can become a complete autonomous circuit, without any alliances or contacts with other circuits. It would be a mere marginal network. But to conserve such a situation of a closed circuit, it ought to be more organized and take into account the traditional problems of orthodoxy and orthopraxis. 3. Today Mail Art has grown into a position where it keeps contacts with the official art circuit, yet there are problems of communication and misunderstanding." (31)

It is easy to simply ignore the existence of pressing issues facing Mail Art activity. The first option of stopping Mail Art could occur through the inability to arrive at network consensus over critical issues. Conversely, too many rules could drive away newcomers and longstanding Mail Artists.

There is tremendous faith among some Mail Artists that the Mail Art network will survive eternally in spite of what course others wish upon it. Nothing short of an international mail strike, enormous postage hikes, power outages or global thermonuclear war could sever the network as it exists today. Nevertheless, monetary exploitation, censorship and overly zealous egos can distort the positive spirit of collaboration through cooperation and do pose a threat to the credibility of Mail Art as an open medium.

The second option listed by Bleus contends that Mail Art could function as a closed, autonomous circuit. In essence, this prevents any creative movement into spheres of new interaction. Removing social intercourse detaches Mail Art from new sources of inspiration. Mail Art is linked to life... life is linked to Mail Art. Without the assurances of creative freedom Mail Artists may as well form a Postal Union.

Although not clearly stated, Bleus presents a third statement which appears to support some Mail Art interaction with museums and leading educational institutions. Positive movement in those areas depends on the emphasis of Mail Art process over Mail "artifact". This will be discussed later.

Communication is information and misinformation, messages arriving and messages lost, understanding and mis-interpreting. Mail Art

is not a pristine egalitarian art movement which everyone embraces. Some Mail Artists either tire of the movement or drop out for more worldly pursuits.

Canadian Mail Artist and performance artist Anna Banana states that those who quit Mail Art do so for a variety of reasons among which are, "other demands on their time, a feeling that they had taken the medium as far as it could go, or that they were not interested in mailing to vast numbers of people who sent out unrelenting amounts of quick-copy material." (32)

Some Mail Artists control their amount of exposure to Mail Art by selecting "cells" of ten or twelve correspondents. Social interaction and global network activity is limited by this strategy as a way to increase the quality of private interaction. While the quality of this one-to-one "CORE-response Art" might be greatly enhanced, a "locked-in-cell" remains an insulated, closed circuit realm unless strategies are devised which initiate interaction with new sources in or outside of the network.

Conversely, interaction among core, "cell" group members can offer mutual support and a focus for specialized activities. Correspondence outside of closed-cells is the best remedy for breaking up Mail Art inertia. Each Mail Artist quickly finds out what their Mail Art threshold is. Sometimes the only solution is to change addresses and adopt new pseudonyms, an enticing strategy of Mail Art resurrection.

VIII

Money and Mail Art Don't Mix!

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges facing the Mail Art network today is the magnetic lure of success in the High Art marketplace. To what extent are Mail Artists crossing over into the art establishment? Are the motives for mixing Mail Art with money and fame decisions that are morally responsible? The art critic Suzi Gablik describes the High Art culture as a self-centered society geared towards the materialistic consumption of artists and their products. She poses an urgent question to all artists:

"How is it possible for artists living in a society centered on production, consumption and

success to become independent personalities and to once more exert their influence on society? Only, perhaps, by the willingness to apply an inner brake that says "no" to the dominant claims of our times, even when everybody else says "yes." Rather than vainly attempting to abolish the system, it will mean altering the values that motivate one's striving." (33)

The suggestion made by Gablik is nothing short of a radical change of consciousness in perceiving the current art market. Her proposal is echoed by past philosophers of the Mail Art network. It comes as no surprise that Gablik was an early student of Ray Johnson's New York Correspondence School of the 1960s. (34) Inexplicably, there are no references to Mail Art as a consciousness raising movement in Gablik's recent controversial book, Has Modernism Failed? In a subsequent article appearing in the June, 1985 issue of New Art Examiner, Gablik states:

"...Many people are finding that involvement in conventional art world activities diminishes their capacity for creative cooperation with others, even while it reinforces the credibility of an exploitative system which generates competition for attention and power... The future of art, I am convinced, does not lie with the Julian Schnabels and Andy Warhols of this world, with their million dollar contracts and ecologically insensitive lifestyles. Such individuals embody the ideal of a free society which has become perverted - and which cannot possibly work out, or even make sense, as long as it remains dedicated to nothing but the greatest glory of competitive egos." (35)

Again, there is no mention here of Mail Art as a viable alternative to "marketplace mentality" in the arts. How can Mail artists effectively promote a conscious alternative to High Art when so many of them are actively pursuing careers in the gallery system? Are Mail Artists willing to risk their "professional High Art careers" by condemning the system that might clothe and feed them? What about the teachers, photographers, writers and poets who make their living in non-art related fields, yet create art on the side intended for marketplace consumption? Is the association between High Art and Mail Art too

close? This close association depends heavily on the motivation of each Mail Artist.

Los Angeles Mail Artist, Lon Spiegelman, believes that if Mail Artists can stick together, "...the establishment can't have their way with us." Spiegelman is responsible for having coined the Mail Art axiom, "Money and Mail Art don't mix." Today he feels that most people misinterpret what he means by the phrase. In a letter, Spiegelman writes:

"A lot of people don't (to this day) understand what I mean when I say that 'money and mailart don't mix.' All I'm trying to say is that, within the general framework of the mailart network, one artist does not ask for or expect another "contributing" artist to send money in order to complete or support any joint venture. What transpires outside of this mailart network is another thing, even though the word 'mailart' is used and applies to the subject matter at hand."
(36)

More of this form of dialogue is essential if Mail Artists are to reach a consensus. In the past, Mail Artists never intended to function as a commodity system; "Commodity systems have their own sort of growth, but they bring neither the personal transformations nor the social and spiritual cohesion of gift exchange." (37)

Primitive, pre-industrial cultures saw art as a way of life, not as a marketable commodity. Art was a sacred process intertwined with nature's life force, a ritual confirmation of tribal worth. In today's society, Mail Art functions as the only contemporary international art movement which values social and spiritual bonding through gift exchange.

However, Networking activist, Volker Hamann of Berlin, West Germany, doubts the credibility of Mail Art as an alternative, open forum now that profiteers are trying to sell Mail "artifacts". In a letter, Hamann uses Networking to describe the free-flow of creative ideas outside the realm of "Mail Art professionalism."

"I have had many experiences with people who use Mail Art as something that needs to be exploited. As such I am no more a Mail Artist and am convinced now that I never was one. For me that's very relaxing. I'll communicate with

someone using the network for free-flow of thoughts and projects that don't mix money or my professional part of being an artist. I find no one who links Mail Art and a professional art career who remains clear, understandable or convincing. I win time and power to be offensive in other areas than Mail Art. I care for a NETWORK that fights with a human spirit for a human world." (38)

Because Mail Art is given freely in a spirit of mutual trust and sharing, there is ample opportunity for individuals to rip-off others. It is possible that some Mail Art pieces will have inherent value which could make some individuals wealthy. There is also the danger that Mail Artists may find the sale of Mail Artwork a prime motivational force and a measuring meter for judging individual success. In this kind of scenario Mail Art is destined to follow the way of all flesh. Mail Art, in this pejorative context terminates as "Ex-post-facto." Lon Spiegelman offers some possible guidelines for Mail Art:

"I have no problem with selling anything called 'mailart' to the general, non-participating public who wants to buy it, as long as the person who creates that piece of art reaps the rewards from his or her efforts. I could never take a piece that you sent to me as a piece of correspondence and sell it to anybody to put money into my own pocket. However, if someone were to look through my archives and see your work and want to purchase something of yours - I'd give them your address and put you two in touch with each other. Same holds true if I were hosting a mailart show and someone came up to me with the same request." (39)

Since it is possible for anybody to host a Mail Art show with hidden designs to sell everything freely given, it is unlikely that Spiegelman's sense of fair play will be recognized by all. There are hundreds of Mail Art shows every year and past experiences have taught Mail Artists to be careful of exploitation. Money and Mail Art mix nicely for profiteers.

IX

Mail Art Fame

Traditionally, fame and name dropping have been negative qualities which Mail Artists usually associate with the High Art marketplace. However, Guglielmo Achille Cavellini is an art collector and wealthy fast-food chain owner from Brescia, Italy who has bought his way into Mail Art fame. Ironically, success was not attained by selling art in the marketplace. Instead, Cavellini bought fame through a massive dispersal of Cavellini stickers, books, posters and stamps; all aimed at honoring his centennial birthday. (Appendix, Figure 2)

While Cavellini plays a comical parody of the fame game, some Mail Artists wonder if he personifies more than High Art. Nagging questions growing out of the New York City 22 Wooster St. Gallery Mail Art panel discussions continued to persist through September, 1984 when a Mail Art event called Inter-Dada '84 was held in San Francisco. Organized through the efforts of Ginny Lloyd and Terrance McMahon, the seven days of festivities (September 2 - 9) included film, dance, video, poetry and fashion shows. Cavellini, after a good deal of persuasion from Ginny Lloyd and Carlo Pittore, decided to fly from Europe to attend the festivities in San Francisco. According to John Held, Mail Artist and Director of Modern Realism Gallery in Dallas, Tx., the appearance of Cavellini "was central to both the spirit of the Festival and an added sense of historic continuity." (40)

Interestingly, it was the sense of historic continuity which seemed pretentious to some of the Inter-Dada participants. One artist, Pat Fish, recorded the following entry in her published diary, "Insufficient Dada; Memoirs of Inter-Dada '84."

"The convocation in San Francisco was a gathering of the lost tribes of Postal Art, an opportunity for pen pals to meet each other after a long postal correspondence, and a definition of the state of affairs for the international postal network. What was great was meeting in the flesh those people I had met on paper exclusively for so many years, seeing what they look like and sharing a cup of espresso or a beer while exchanging world

views and cosmologies. The sad thing was seeing that the collectors and archivists have begun to hover over the ephemera. It was like having a weathered tintype, squinting to see the features of some famous dada of the past, whose name lives on in the history books and whose face in a group portrait in some smoky cafe looks back with irony and speaks for a time when artists really lived their feelings and fears on the outside of their beings.

As much as there is a modern resurgence of the dada spirit, we are it, and yet the overwhelming mood of the events was complacency and name dropping; an insider's club, art historian talk... not the radical discussions of the confrontation politics of graffiti and mass mailing and xerox publications that I had expected to organize and take part in.

I believe that postal art, as an intimate successor to the heretics of the past who made found art and bizarre cabaret, has the potential to make every person an artist, to give the power of creation back to the people. On the contrary, Inter-Dada served those who want heroes. The history books will say I was there. Meanwhile, I've gone back to work at the real business of art: communication." (41)

The hope for Mail Art that can involve people from all walks of life was not in evidence at Inter-Dada '84. While the excitement of performance art persisted throughout the festival, Mail Art interaction with the public was illusive. According to Los Angeles Dadaist Michael Mollet, the Mail Art show "...was another floor-to-ceiling mailart show in the gallery of the 16th Note." (42) Approximately three hundred artists mailed over 1,000 Mail artworks to the 16th Note Gallery; all of it hung according to John Held, "in the now familiar manner - limited space and overabundance of material." (43) In the Inter-Dada '84 Mail art catalogue mailed a year later to participants, Ginny Lloyd called the Mail Art show, "a spectacle for the old timers as well as those new to mail art." (44)

Thanks to the efforts of Lisa Sellyeh and Michael Bidner, the Particifax Telecommunications Project (see p. 13) offered direct on-site links between 16th Note Gallery and Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Regardless of the availability of Particifax, very few accounts exist which document existing activities between attending Mail

Artists, public visitors, or projects linking the three hundred Mail Artists on the walls to those viewing their work. Michael Mollet's wry comments summarized the "Inter-Dada Mail Art spectacle": "It cudda been better. It cudda been worse." (45)

Mail Artists, while gathering under the umbrella of performance art events, artistamp expositions, rubberstamp conventions, artistbook fairs and Dada festivals have yet to emerge with creative mailing activities. Artistic egos and the quest for fame appear to be preventing Mail Artists from achieving positive collaborative interaction in the global village.

The possibility of an International Mail Art Exposition depends on the ability of participants to work in unison towards basic communicative goals. Rather than meeting to politically argue, Mail Artists should put collaborative mailing theories into practice. Temperance of ego, especially those of artists, is something to hope and strive for, but Mail Art is also about individual participants, who, in spite of the noblest intentions, fail. David Cole, formerly a New York City University instructor and now an active concrete poet and philosopher of Mail Art goodwill, has much faith in the ability of Mail Artists to rise above ego towards egalitarian exchange. At the 22 Wooster St. Gallery Mail Art panel discussions Cole stated:

"It is crucially important that one learn to experience with one's eyes, and finally with one's mind. That the information that is moving around the planet is an open piece of information, into which we all have equal access and equal readability." (46)

David Zack, working on Correspondence Art Novels in Tepoztlan, Morelos, Mexico, upholds egalitarian exchange by recognizing all participants as authorities; "In networks we all have our authority... that's very important... so we have to be at ease with authority." (47) Mail Art, like High Art, may become a vehicle for stardom with participants competing amidst the clamor of fame claims; "Hey! Look how great I am... See how well I communicate!" A Mail Art Networker will ask a quiet question instead, "What do I have to communicate, anyway?" This is called philosophy.

X

Tourism

In the 1980s Mail Artists have increasingly crossed continents in order to meet old friends of correspondence. Swiss Mail Art tourist, Hans Ruedi Fricker took note of these events and became the agent of Mail Art's first "ism", Tourism. Fricker writes thought provoking slogans and cunning analogies between Mail Art "Tourists" and the pursuit of souvenirs:

"In Europe and the U.S. we don't have real reason to contact ourselves. The majority of Mail Artists don't produce Mail Art to communicate among themselves. They are hoping to be recognized by Museums or magazines. In the U.S., Mail Artists form a market... This is the reason that I organized the ICON show; because we don't make correspondence, we only make ICONS, souvenirs of Mail Art. Maybe I'm not a Mail Artist but a producer of souvenirs through Mail Art." (48)

Fricker's correspondence is laced with rubber stamp images and phrases which mock Mail Art history and the existence of sloganeering. (Appendix, fig. 3) The author of many slogans, Fricker rubber stamps "Damned to be a tourist" and "M.O.M.A., the Museum of Mail Art." Alongside "M.O.M.A." is a U.S.A. seal that says "United Suspected Artists". Fricker apologized to Ray Johnson (creator of the New York Correspondence School) by claiming that the Mail Art network is no longer a school but is now a tourist office.

In a letter from Lon Spiegelman to Hans Ruedi Fricker, Spiegelman states that in Tourism, Mail Artists "throw away the postage stamp and put it into an airline ticket." (49) Most European Mail Art Tourists buy tickets destined for New York City or Los Angeles. Understandably, New York City and Los Angeles are major points of entry but they are also international High Art centers. Is it possible that some Mail Art "centers of influence" are emerging in major European and American cities? What happens to the Mail Art ideal of equal access and equal readability to those artists unable to attend "Mail Art events" or gatherings in major American and European cities?

Increasingly, it is clear that Mail Artists need to reverse the process of geographic centralization in future Mail Art activities.

Instead of spheres of Mail Art influence, Mail Artists need to create a new sphere. Instead of Mail Art "Tourism", Mail Artists need to detour to influence those outside their circles of friendship. If Mail Artists must meet, let it be in the creative context of positive collaboration which reaches beyond the ego. Before the stamp is swapped for airline tickets, Mail Artists should reconsider how elements of time and distance can be positive factors which encourage the resolution of Mail Art issues. Accumulative mailing strategies could be used to arrive at a consensus over issues. When collaborative communication is encouraged, competition is reduced. Mail is a major tool at hand but effective communication should be the objective.

XI Networking Currents

There are currents within the mailstream which free-flow from primary sources underground, currents which are destined for the growth of world community, communion and communication. While the mainstream moves perilously towards marketing centers, new channels are being opened by networks branching outward, reaching fresh sources of inspiration. These Networking currents reflect projects of the past and present which personify what Mail Art has been and can be if a consensus can be reached by its advocates. The following projects will draw criticism from some and hope from others. In any case these concepts represent the spirit to move onward.

Networking projects provide positive direction for active growth. Can Mail Art Networking take place in museums? This has been an issue raised frequently in 1984, and deserves consideration now.

Just as the postal system can be used to add depth to the Mail Art concept, so can museums and educational systems. The Mail Art object/message doesn't have to cease functioning within museum walls. True, to date very little creative work has emerged which gives meaning and form to "living messages" within institutional spaces. In Mail Art it is often said, "the mailbox is the museum." Conceivably, the "museum as a mailbox" could serve as a powerful outlet for public interaction. Might the integrity of Mail art as an alternative system be preserved if the Networker and curator interacted in good faith?

The traditional Mail Art exhibition began with Ken Friedman's "Omaha Flows System." Friedman's concept enhanced the possibility of public interaction with Mail Art through the use of traditional institutions. A brilliant strategist, Friedman sent 5,000 invitations worldwide to Mail Artists inviting them to trade art with the public at the Joslyn Art Museum.

Michael Crane's reference to "Omaha Flows System" in Correspondence Art lists the delivery of invitations to 2,000 worldwide. Official documentation, however, from the "Western Association of Art Museums Newsletter" and The Joslyn Art Museum report that 5,000 invitations were mailed. Before the last week of the exhibition, Joslyn project workers had logged in 1,000 works of art. Reportedly, another 3,000 - 4,000 artifacts were unlogged.

In an attempt to find out whether all logged and unlogged Mail Art works were in Joslyn's archives, I conducted a telephone interview with Assistant-Curator, Ruby Hagerbaumer. Interestingly, the "Omaha Flows" archive box appears to have never been opened until I requested permission by phone to do so. Ms. Hagerbaumer indicated that the box was not large and that the unopened contents, although many, appeared to be fewer than 1,000.

Orbital "network participants" in Friedman's "Omaha Flows System" included the University of Nebraska at Omaha, Creighton University, Concordia Teachers College and the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, Lincoln, Nebraska. In addition, Friedman extended the network to children from Omaha schools and Omaha's Westroads Shopping Mall. The strategy was to encourage any visitors at the museum or orbital sites to select a work from the wall and replace it with a work of their own creation. While visiting the exhibition in its first week of display I was confused as to why there was so little public interaction in evidence.

In a telephone interview with former Joslyn curator, Harrison Taylor, I discovered that the exhibition seen displayed in Gallery A had been later moved to a larger display area to accommodate its explosive growth. Three days into the the exhibition "Omaha Flows" had overflowed!

Taylor, working closely with Ken Friedman, recalled that people were afraid to take work off the wall:

"They had to ask questions before they could start with us. One lady told Ken (Friedman), 'I want that piece on the wall but I have nothing to exchange!' I remember Ken replied, 'Can you work? Go home and bake a loaf of bread.' She came back with a loaf of bread, placed it on the table, and darned if someone didn't exchange their art for the bread. It was like that after people caught on. The entire exhibition changed over three times. That's why so little of it remains at the Joslyn." (50)

Early into the exhibition, Taylor learned that "somebody had to be there to monitor... to encourage the public. Ken couldn't see it that way but I discovered it right away." (51) Taylor deserves considerable credit for realizing the importance of Friedman's concept. Not only did Taylor take a bold step in convincing an indifferent museum staff, but he spent hours of time at the exhibition site constantly encouraging public interaction.

"Omaha Flows System" used a "global collage" concept for exhibiting all works. In this context the mailed "artifact" is always unframed and pinned up in an overlapping arrangement. In totality, the global collage is an overwhelming, confusing, cluttered, chaotic display in which the importance of the individual message is lost. The "global collage" registers visual shock rather than a conceptual flow of meaningful communication.

The presentation of a "global collage" at "Omaha Flows" was minimalized by stressing more important, active concepts of exchange. On site exchange with monitoring help did offset public confusion. Indeed, the hard work of Taylor and Friedman made this exhibition a monumental success unsurpassed today. Although schools, shopping malls, universities, colleges and museums were combined into one "flowing network", there are two disturbing loose ends which need further research. 1. The remaining Mail "artifacts" from "Omaha Flows" are embalmed within the basement archives of Joslyn Art Museum. Further research by Joslyn's curatorial staff is needed. An "Omaha Flows System" display in the museum is warranted. 2. "Omaha Flows System" failed to grow beyond the Joslyn's walls in the greater Omaha metropolitan area from which most of the viewing public came.

A few successful learning experiences through Mail Art make an entire effort worthwhile, but in a larger context, Mail Art needs public interaction that is sustained beyond the initial museum encounter. Perhaps a Mail Artist in residence could reinforce on-going Mail Art activities in the museum environment.

Networking educational institutions is an ambition of California Postal Artist, Pat Fish, who is the first person certified to teach Mail Art in the California Community College Adult Education System:

"I am pushing the ideas of Mail Art into the lives of unsuspecting people who are just beginning to expand their self-images to include the role of artist. It has to do with the genius concept, breaking down the awe and mystery that separates the average person from creativity. It teaches intrinsic dignity." (52)

Imaginative strategies that emphasize the Mail Art process over product could be valuable tools in education. Many art museums include educational departments which could serve as beginning points for enterprising Networkers. Daily workshops conducted by Networkers in museum or educational environments could be coordinated with on-going international Mail Art shows.

John Held, a Mail Artist who holds a position in the Fine Arts division of the Dallas Public Library has organized numerous international Mail Art shows within that institution. From November 18 - December 30, 1984, John networked with the Education Department of the Dallas Museum of Art where he designed a Mail Art event to improve communication skills. The Dallas Museum of Art hosted seven workshops for over one hundred and fifty children and adults. In addition, they had a Mail Art show that included over seven hundred and fifty children from twenty five public schools. Many local rubber stamp companies and well known Mail Artists like Steve Random, Creative Thing, Minoy and Andrej Tisma contributed their stamps and designs for the children. (53)

In conjunction with international Mail Art exhibitions, official postal stations could function within museum walls. Special exhibition cancellation marks for international Mail Art shows could be designed by a Mail Artist and submitted to United States Postal Officials for

approval as a "Postal Service Pictorial Cancellation Mark." Mail Artists could establish new methods for "working exhibitions" by observing state, local or national philatelic expositions.

The first official support for Mail Art in education came in 1981 when I was given a Hilda Maehling Fellowship by the National Education Association to promote Mail Art in a national high school Postal Art network. The project connected over 3,000 students from seventy-six high schools in thirty-six states with one hundred active international Mail Artists. In May, 1981 the National Education Association recognized the importance of Mail Art by hosting "The 3rd National High School Postal Art Exhibition" in their Washington D.C. headquarters lobby. This exhibition was the culmination of three major National High School Postal Art Exhibitions held from 1979-1981. (54)

Polish Networker, Henryk Gajewski organized the participation of artists in an international project entitled "Other Child Book." In an appeal for artistic works which preserve the "unique sensitivity of childhood" Gajewski received over four hundred artworks from two hundred and fifty artists representing twenty-nine countries. These artists were asked to work with children between the ages of four and ten years, to be enlightening and not doctrinaire. An exhibition of the "Other Child Book" was organized in February, 1985 by the Burchfield Art Center in Buffalo, New York. Henryk Gajewski was there to give educational workshops.

Another early effort to link education with contemporary Mail Art was made by Lon Spiegelman who organized the "Help Teach Mail Art Show" at LA Otis Art Institute in 1980. Randy Harellson, author of S.W.A.K., a Mail Art book for children, also coordinated with Lon Spiegelman and with me in activating a thriving educational Mail Art network in the U.S. Jim "Tane" Burns is a Mail Artist who has succeeded in pioneering Mail Art programs with his high school students in Dubbo, Australia. In the late 1970s and early 1980s these individuals were actively helping each other reach a future world generation of Mail Artists.

XII

Networking New Spheres of Influence

Emergence beyond traditional Mail Art shows, artist-to-artist communication strategies and Tourism (See p. 27) ensures Mail Art remains open and spiritually vital as new spheres of creative influence are explored. Pat Fish is Networking through new spheres of influence by connecting the world of tattooists with Mail Art. She will be assembling original, lifesize tattoo designs from the Mail Art and public sector in a Commonpress book assemblage scheduled to be published in 1986:

"In the tattoo world most of the tattooists use drawings called "Flash" to stencil the designs onto the skin before needling. I want contributors to think carefully about what kind of tattoo they would get and draw it to actual size and show on a diagram where it would go on the body. The final book ought to be collected in a year or so, I'd think, and feature a wide variety of fantasies.

I will be going to the International Tattooing Convention in Seattle next March and there I will explain postal art and CommonPress to the Tattoo world and ask for their contribution. That will accomplish the uniting of two entirely separate worlds of art, ones equally outcast, untamable, not "collectable" for profit. Populated as they are by rogues and eccentrics, I know that this meeting of minds will cross-reference the world in a new shuffling." (55) (Appendix, fig. 4)

Efforts have been made by a few Networking Artists to establish new connections in areas of the world where mail and artists' activities are closely monitored. David Jarvis' recent "Pochta" artiststamp project (Appendix, fig. 5) is an international effort to arouse Mail Art activity in the Soviet Union. On behalf of Soviet and Mongolian artists, Jarvis invited free-world Mail Artists to be surrogate Soviets. Afterwards, he responded:

"In the Japan AU Mail Art Book, Volume II, there is a map showing countries the artists come from. No arrows point to the USSR, nor remote Mongolia. So I thought, couldn't we do something on their behalf, as surrogate Soviet/Mongolian Mail Artists? From this came the present project.

The title: 'Pochta' is Russian for 'post'. On August 10, 1984 I spoke to Harry Fox (Fox is a Tampa, Fl. Mail Art stampist) then in London, about the idea and began sending invitations before September 3 when UK postage went up. Later on, I did get some USSR addresses (no replies)... but at that stage all invitations went outside USSR/Mongolia." (56)

In June, 1985, Mimi Acosta and the Seattle Peace Chorus circulated invitations in the Mail Art network which called for "statements from citizens about their wish/vision of peace to distribute to Soviet citizens. If you want to participate, please send some mail art on the theme of human unity, peace or world beyond war... All contributions accepted. Documentation." (57) The Seattle Peace Chorus' "Stamp for Peace Mail Art Event" could be the first successful exchange between the Mail Art world and Russian citizens.

Networker Volker Hamann is forging ahead with global communication, community and communion in Ghana, Africa. In July, 1985, Hamann scheduled a workcamp and Mail Art show in which artworks that would evoke positive cultural exchange, communication, global connection and discussion. In addition, Hamann asked Mail Artists to meet in Ghana to work with villagers over a period of two weeks. Hamann states:

"The Mail Art show shall be part of the process in the group and with the villagers... The theme is the whole situation itself. What makes sense there, what can be supporting? What is Mail Art worth in International cooperation and cross-cultural communications as they relate to African problems and solutions." (58) (Appendix, fig. 6)

At the time of this writing I received first word of another exciting Mail Art proposal from Networker Wally Darnell. Known as Mail Art's "travelling ambassador", Darnell received permission from the government of China to host "The First International Mail Art Show in the People's Republic of China". Darnell organized "The First International Mail Art Show in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia", in 1981. The Mail Art theme, "Mr. Sandman Send Me a Dream" evoked responses from around the world.

Will Darnell succeed in obtaining Mail Art from Chinese artists and/or "The People"? The Mail

Art theme for China's first Mail Art show was "Send a Fortune Cookie" with a deadline listed as June 1, 1985. Darnell's expectations were expressed in a letter dated March 4, 1985:

"Just what this will develop into is very unclear, but I have already informed the authorities that I will be receiving odd bits and lumps of strange foreign mail, and they say there is no problem. I caution most strongly, that nothing be sent of any political nature whatsoever. This includes Marxism or Communism as well as Capitalism. The failure to be very careful about this point could send me packing in a day's time." (59) (Appendix, fig. 7)

There is an enormous amount of risk-taking in a situation of this kind. The creative potential in Darnell's proposal could lead to positive interaction between artists and public in China and the free-world or it could lead to a governmental suppression of mail gone awry. What terrible fortunes could possibly spill out of a Chinese fortune cookie?

XIII

Fighting Censorship Through Networking

What possible "threat" can mail delivered by artists have upon a political dictatorship? For that matter, what power does any form of art have in altering governmental repression of human rights through censorship?

"It is always easy for sophisticates to exaggerate the influence on the mass of people of works, theoretical or aesthetic, which, however important they were in shaping the opinions of the intellectual minority, can have at best only a very indirect effect on the majority... But the moral effect of art-works is limited not only by the relatively small number of people any work is likely to touch, but also by at least two other factors. First of all, works designed to be aesthetic objects do tend to be self-contained much more for appreciation than to further action. Secondly, to the extent that art-works do have an influence on moral conduct, it is an influence which is in comparison with many other influences seldom impressively strong." (60)

This passage by James L. Jarrett was written over twenty-five years ago before the full significance of global communication networks were technologically feasible. Mail Art as a worldwide movement was not to appear until the 1970s. The very existence of Networking mass communication among thousands of artists and non-artists around the world holds promise that power can be exercised effectively to bring about some form of change. In Networking, the moral effect of artwork is no longer limited by the small number of people it will touch. Networking also explodes the idea that aesthetic objects are limited to self containment as products for appreciation or images incapable of inducing action. Finally, there are several impressive cases in which Mail Art has cancelled Jarrett's contention that art in the midst of many other influences seldom appears to be impressively strong.

Circumstantial evidence shows that two South American Mail Artists, Clemente Padin and Jorge Caraballo, were instrumental in contributing to the recent democratization of Uruguay in November, 1984. Their international vocalization through Mail Art helped forge the birth of artistic solidarity in Uruguay and abroad. The effectiveness of their anti-government pamphlets and postcards caused both to be imprisoned by the Uruguayan government in their native Montevideo in August, 1977. (Appendix, fig. 8) They disappeared into what Mail Art activist and writer Geoffrey Cook described as a penal system with one of the worst records on earth for violating human rights. In February, 1978, he compared the disappearance of both artists to the loss of a Lorca or a Walter Benjamin. Geoffrey Cook was instrumental in coordinating action within the international Mail Art community and through Amnesty International. In a letter, Cook explained his actions: "Direct action is what's needed. A Mail Art Show never freed anyone. It is only a propaganda tool. Propaganda is important, but it is impotent without a front line attack." (61)

Two years later, in another letter from Cook, evidence is cited of success:

"Because of pressure put upon the Uruguayan government they were discovered alive! Due to pressure from the French and American ambassadors, they were tried and convicted of attacking the morale and reputation of the Uruguayan Army, Padin

was specifically cited for a satirical pamphlet he wrote. Due to further pressure we were able to mount, they were both paroled (Caraballo was paroled in the Spring of 1979, Padin in the Fall of that same year). They are not allowed to do their art, communicate, or hold jobs. I shall work towards their emigration if they desire to do so." (62)

Clemente Padin is one of the most important aesthetic minds in the International Networking movement. His work (Appendix, fig. 9) is imbued with strong sociological and structural purpose. He edited Ovum, an important South American Mail Art journal and was instrumental in organizing an International Mail Art Show at the Plastic Arts Museum in Montevideo. It was disheartening to discover that after Padin and Caraballo were released, a government imposed censorship was placed on both men.

Cook, in a letter dated September 11, 1980, mentions of word from Padin of a parole.

"Recently, (last Friday) a card from Clemente arrived in my mail box! It was the first communication in over 3 1/2 years. In it he said that he was free at home on parole, and that he was afraid to continue with his mail art activities because that was why he was convicted in 1977. I have circumstantial evidence that he is pretty depressed." (63)

In sporadic contact with Padin since 1981, I received a letter from him March 20, 1984 which revealed surveillance of our correspondence. Written in Berlin, West Germany while pursuing a fellowship, Padin explicitly requested that his letter not be published.

I must emphasize that in spite of continued harassment, Padin was able to get messages into the mailstream. According to Padin, "I sent messages (from prison) by means of companions who were liberated. Now I remember messages to Cook, Dick Higgins, Wolf Vostell and others, but I don't know if they received the letters." (64)

When Solidarity was outlawed by the Polish government and mail was censored, Mail Artists in that country succeeded in making contact with friends in free-world countries. I attained contact with Polish Mail Artist Pawel Petasz by mailing materials indirectly through mutual

friends in Czechoslovakia who forwarded the same material onward to Petasz in Poland. In a letter dated February 2, 1986, Pawel Patasz described the censorship of Polish mail from 1980 to present:

"There is a difference between the time before 1980 when there was no special trouble with the post and the control was unofficial and thereafter discrete. Then there was 1981 when the control was still more discrete and everything literally was able to be mailed in and out. Then there was martial law since December 13, 1981 when everything was officially "censored" and "uncensored"; All rubberstamps and postage were to be applied correctly using plain clean envelopes without anti-state slogans in the language of stamps. My participation in the Biennale de Paris was returned for reason of being mailed in a second-hand envelope.

When martial law was eventually terminated there was a lot of arrogance that remained. There were times I had to pay for the "custom control" of letters. Plenty of correspondence simply disappears, especially mailart. Government "checkers" sometimes omit the responsibility of making a decision by letting letters vanish and other times the mail is stolen." (65)

Other accounts of "stolen" or "missing" mail had been reported by East German mail artist Berger Jesch. In order to stop strange disappearances of his mail, Jesch changed his address several times. (66)

The first governmental censorship of an international Mail Art exhibition occurred in South America in 1976. The organizers, Paulo Bruscky and Daniel Santiago, coordinated the "International Exhibition of Mail Art" which was to have run from August 27 to September 11, 1976, in Recife, Brazil. The Argentine Mail Artist, Edgardo Vigo, whose own son disappeared mysteriously in 1976 and is still missing today, writes of the censorship of the "International Exhibition of Mail Art" in Recife, Brazil:

"Those of us who were not present (at the 'International Mail Art Exhibition' in Recife, Brazil) were surprised to receive a circular in which the participants and critics were notified that 'The Exposition... was suspended for reasons beyond our control.' Those reasons were revealed

later... In a letter of March 2, 1977, Paulo Bruscky explained what happened to the author of this article: 'You probably already know that the Segunda Exposicao Internacional de Arte Correo was prohibited and censored by the police and that we (the organizers) were even held prisoners for three days. The exposition was closed one hour after its opening.' Bruscky, in a letter of March 3, 1977 denounces the fact that the works seized by the police were returned one month later, torn up and partially destroyed. This included works not only by many Brazilians, but by foreigners as well, and many of them are irretrievable because they form a part of the police process. A sad fate for a youthful expression. Unfortunately, such occurrences are spreading." (67)

In 1980, The Franklin Furnace in New York City presented a show on Dadaistic and Surrealistic "Correspondence Art" and banned books which had been smuggled out of Romania over a twelve year period. Valery Oistenau, author of "Illegal Mail Art" in the Franklin Furnace Flue, gives personal accounts of having grown up behind the iron curtain where "even the most elementary letter is a tool of subversion." (68)

"Correspondence with Westerners is very tightly censored and controlled. The letters have a lengthy two week delay to allow snooping KGB agents to x-ray, xerox and translate all mail. The only way to communicate with the outside world of freedom is to code everything. I finally escaped to Rome due to Mail Art." (69)

Social ideals as represented by Mail Art exhibitions and projects in South America have led to arrests of many Mail Artists. It has been argued by European Mail Artists that Mail Art in America lacks a commitment to moral responsibility or personal risk. Hans Ruedi Fricker believes Americans create toys for art objects. (See p. 27) "When American artists say 'we play', they create toys.... Europeans play with the reality, that's the difference." (70) While it is true that social responsibility does require a personal sacrifice it should be remembered that moral principles are oftentimes at variance among cultures. Nonetheless, Suzie Gablik points out "moral conclusions" which apply to artists working in Europe and America.

"After all is said and done, moral pursuits are unlikely to advance anyone's career today, and will only produce a conflict of values which cannot be resolved, given the general state of affairs. Since everything suggests the continuation of these trends, how can we keep ourselves from becoming gifted functionaries of the system on the one hand while still managing not to starve to death on the other? Unfortunately, these questions cannot be solved; they can only be faced." (71)

Perhaps it is spiritual rather than physical starvation which American and European Mail Artists should fear. While Mail Art activity brings no monetary wealth it offers sustenance and solidarity through sharing ideals of love, hope, trust, cooperation, collaboration and creative gift exchange. These are attributes which collectively make the international Mail Art movement the most important art movement in the world today. Working together in this transcendent spirit can bring positive change to some systems. Networking within museums and educational systems can bring forth positive interaction among institutions, artists and the public, but what about changing political systems? Gablik continues: (see pp. 29-33)

"Through our choices, changes can begin to take place in and through us. We can begin to move our world from a position of moral ambiguity to one of clarity. To be in any sense effective, however, we must proceed in conjunction with the system, but using its institutions as channels for positive change instead of for self-seeking. Only in this way can we strive for rescue from the system, even while we are enmeshed in it. We are the stewards, not the victims, of our circumstances." (72)

In some countries like South Africa and Poland, it is impossible to follow Suzie Gablik's advice and work in conjunction "with systems"; especially those which do not respect basic human rights of self-expression. Networking involves a belief in human rights and works in opposition to those systems to bring forth expressive freedom.

Conversely, people from countries with opposing political ideologies could be drawn

together by positive Networking strategies. The "Stamp for Peace Mail Art Event" organized by the Seattle Peace Chorus is an exemplary proposal to link international Mail Artists with Soviet citizens. It might also be possible to initiate a dialogue of good will between the children of America and the Soviet Union. Coordinated exchange and Mail Art exhibitions could be arranged in the educational systems of both countries. A belief in the basic goodness of mankind must evolve in a simple fashion, for we live in dangerously complex times.

XIV

Networking in Eastern Europe

J.P. Jacob, Mail Art editor of "PostHype" magazine is currently assembling photographic art which he collected from over seventy-five East European artists. Many of the contributors have never heard of Mail Art, yet the distribution of invitations somehow reached these East European artists. J.P. Jacob relates some of the interesting* aspects of his East European photography project: (Appendix, fig. 10)

"One of the most interesting aspects is the fact that many of the artists heard of the project from other artists. As you know, setting up a stable network of communication with Eastern artists is difficult. Letters disappear, artists are endangered, etc. So, what has been interesting is the fact that I sent out fifty to seventy-five invitations to artists I knew, whether they worked with photography or not, and asked that they pass on the message to their friends. The early participation of artists who I have found are of great significance in the East helped considerably, and I have received now around two hundred negatives. Whole bodies of work in some cases. And the work is phenomenal! Beautiful stuff! So, I guess that the point I'm making is that this has grown beyond mail art. Many of the artists are not mail artists. Still, it is a good example of working with communication; the fact that word is still passed from one artist to the next. That the artworld contains a variety of networks." (73)

Further into J.P. Jacob's letter, he reveals how an East European photography project evolved:

"It was my fascination with the East European countries, and the subtle responses to the idea of censorship (for his Mail Art exhibition, 'Mailart and the Law: Censorship East/Censorship West') that I was receiving from East Europeans as opposed to the scathing, loud and often oppressively sexual responses from Western artists that inspired me to turn my attentions to the East. As I think I say somewhere in the grant application enclosed, art photography is ruled, for the most part, by the dictates of Western, particularly American and English art photography. The fact that we see very little work by East European artists, and that they, no doubt, see very little work from the West, implies that whatever is going on there photographically must be very different from what we are accustomed to. So, the idea of a book of Eastern European photography becomes desirable in respect to its absence." (74)

The process whereby J.P. Jacob procured East European photographs was one of collective cooperation. Accessibility to the photographs required many artists and non-artists to work together sharing risks with the assumption that Jacob's intentions were honorable. Documentation of this networking process may prove as fascinating as the photographic work.

XV

Networking Marginal Resistance

The collective process which made J.P. Jacob's East European Photography project possible is an important facet of Networking activities by Argentine artist, Graciela Gutierrez Marx. Her activity, known as "Marginal Resistance" is a militant creativity "Which has nothing to do with High Art and much to do with the work of survival." (75)

Graciela Marx networks in the streets and plazas with non-artists she refers to as "base-born." Her activities personify several of the Networking principles I have presented in this book. These principles include Networking to reach non-artists, to surmount ego and superstardom, to create projects which replace competition with cooperation and brotherhood/sisterhood. Networkers can fight to counteract fear and oppression which

is placing mankind on the brink of nuclear oblivion. Graciela Marx's ideals unfold in the public sector where the hope and will for life is enlarged through creative action (Appendix, fig. 11)

"Artists are manipulated every time a system proposes the prize of power, fame and success through MONEY. In this way, High Art lacks morality. Mail Art Superstar egomania is repeated in a false marginal-scale through the same habits it seems to fight against. In this point of the problem I can only propose to give EVERYONE the opportunity of a creative expression by means of little custodial actions, creative actions, played with base-born people.

We (some young people and I) are making contact with people in streets and squares. The El Tendedero Project is an invitation to the people to choose the cloth of a loved one and hand it with a short story in one of the cloth-lines during three weeks in a square of our city. Your project of "Material Metamorphosis" has something to do with it, but in this occasion there weren't artists who made the interventions. People, common folks, played the first roles and their stories were projected as messages full of vital energy, painful experiences, proposals of love and ghosts of dead relatives. At the end of this open exhibition, everybody collaborated to create a composite "Flag of the Collective Memory," sewing it with little pieces of each person's clothing. We then hoisted it at the top of a cane when I realized it was a first step of actual "marginal resistance" and of human poetry in action." (76)

Graciela Marx's Marginal artworks are sometimes humble rituals performed anonymously as in her "Testimony of our first Sowing in the Water." (Appendix, fig. 12) Since September 21, 1983 Graciela Marx and Susana Lombardo return to the spot on the bank of Punta Lara River where they sew material fabric and pray for inner growth. In all of Graciela Marx's marginal activities can be found the moral convictions and ethics she merges with aesthetic communication.

XVI
Solidarity Through Networking

Sharing philosophical solidarity through Networking projects is rewarded by a spiritual sense of communion. West German artistampist, Henning Mittendorf describes the pursuit of these ideals as an endless struggle by artists and non-artists to liberate the inner and outer world through expressive communication. Far more than what can be established in traditional art, Henning Mittendorf defines creative communication as "an attempt to bring more friendship, individualism, sensibility, freedom, love, hope, confidence, tolerance, pluralism, democracy, social balance, peace and much more into the world and into every man and woman." (77)

Twenty years ago Kenneth Boulding wrote The Meaning of the 20th Century and of the birth of a world-wide Networking movement. Even though Boulding was unaware of the emergence of Mail Art and Correspondence Art, he nevertheless captured the moral and spiritual values which have evolved from those art movements. Today, Networking artists clearly personify the new consciousness which Boulding predicted:

"There is in the world today an 'invisible college' of people in many different countries and many different cultures, who have this vision of the nature of the transition through which we are passing and who are determined to devote their lives to contributing towards its successful fulfillment. Membership in this college is consistent with many different philosophical, religious, and political positions. It is a college without buildings and without organization." (78)

More than a school of thought, Mail Art Networking accentuates the actualization of communicative concepts. Networking implies creative action to arrive at solutions to existing problems and newer visions of global consciousness.

Some of the Networking projects presented within this book exemplify concepts which include rather than exclude non-artists, other Networking projects reach those who have been suppressed or censored by their governments, and finally there are Networking projects which assist in breaking down bureaucratic barriers in public institutions like schools and museums. The common denominator

in all these projects is creative communication. Networking knocks on the door offering self-transcendence and a moral sense of world community and communion through creative communication.

